

### **[The Hall COMBAT \(Compensation Owed for Mission Based Activities in Theatre\) Act](#)**

One of my most important priorities this Congress will be passing H.R. 952, the COMBAT Act, to ensure adequate treatment and compensation for soldiers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For too long soldiers have returned from overseas battles, bearing mental and physical wounds, only to be forced to fight another war to get their benefits from the VA. Currently, veterans face an adversarial process when they seek treatment and compensation from the VA. This is especially true for soldiers who have PTSD. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars alone, over 115,000 veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD. Tragically, however, only 53,000 have been granted service-connected disability for their condition.

As it currently stands, veterans have to "prove" the stressor that triggered their PTSD, even if they have already been diagnosed. They need to track down incident reports, buddy statements, present medals, and leap other hurdles to meet the threshold that VA mandates in order to receive desperately needed compensation.

The Combat Act lowers the burdensome threshold that veterans have to meet to receive compensation. Just as our military adapts and reforms its strategies in every war it fights, so must VA to assist the surviving heroes of those wars. [Click here to read more and visit my webpage about the COMBAT Act](#)

### **The Post-9/11 GI Bill**

Last year, Congress enacted the new GI Bill for the 21st Century - the "Post-9/11 GI Bill" - to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. That measure takes effect on August 1st, 2009 and as of May 1st, 2009 veterans can begin to apply for a certificate of eligibility for the new college benefits at the VA website <https://www.gibill.va.gov/>.

After World War II, the first G.I. Bill provided a college education and job training to nearly 8 million veterans, opening the door for millions of families to live the American Dream. For every dollar invested in the G.I. Bill, seven dollars of economic activity was returned. This also helped to set the American economy on the right course after a draining war. It returned \$7 to the economy for every \$1 spent on it.

Current GI educational benefits pay only about 70 percent of a public college education and 30 percent of a private college education. The Post-9/11 GI Bill fully restores full, four-year college scholarships for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans –equal to the educational benefits available after World War II. This bill will make Iraq and Afghanistan veterans part of an American economic recovery, just as the veterans of World War II helped grow and strengthen the American middle class.

[Click here to visit my webpage about available GI Bill benefits](#)

### **The Hall Disability Claims Bill**

H.R. 5892, the Disability Claims Modernization Act, legislation I wrote to overhaul the way the VA processes veterans' disability claims, has passed both the House and Senate and has been signed into law by President Bush. This legislation truly came as the result of the tireless work of veterans and their families to finally receive the treatment and benefits they deserve. Over the past two years, hundreds of veterans have contacted my office seeking help with their long-overdue claims. They told stories of waiting months and years to receive benefits –

benefits earned by their selfless sacrifice -- being given the run around by a Veterans Administration plagued by archaic processing systems and a lack of accountability.

As Chairman of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I held a series of hearings in Washington, DC, and a field hearing on October 8, 2007, in New Windsor, NY, about this unacceptable situation. With the information obtained during these hearings and from meetings with countless veterans, I crafted HR 5892, the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act, legislation that will overhaul the outdated veterans disability claims process and replace it with one that reflects today's medical conditions and diagnoses, eliminates the unnecessary backlog, accelerates approvals by separating easy to confirm disabilities from more complicated ones, and other improvements.

H.R. 5892 comprehensively modernizes the Veterans Benefits Administration and arms it with the up-to-date tools and paradigms it needs improving accountability, timeliness, and quality. Once fully implemented, this bill will help VA become a 21st century, world-class entity that reflects the selfless sacrifices of those it serves – our veterans, their families, and survivors.

[Click here to access a summary of the legislation.](#)

### **Claims Backlog**

Our nation must do a better job of caring for our current and future veterans. It's unconscionable that we ask the men and women of our Armed Forces to be ready to defend America at a moment's notice, and then force them to wait months to receive the assistance they've earned through service and sacrifice. There are currently almost 600,000 backlogged claims at the VA, and with the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan this number is only going to increase unless we act. The Veterans Committee will focus on this issue in detail and reducing the claims backlog will be my top priority in the Committee.

### **Veterans Healthcare**

One of my first votes in Congress was to increase the VA healthcare budget by nearly \$3 billion. The Bush administration has continuously underfunded veterans healthcare and Congress, once again, will have to provide more funding than the President requested to ensure our veterans receive the service they deserve. In the Veterans Committee, I will work to repeal the President's proposal to increase veterans co-pays for prescription drugs. I also support mandatory funding for VA healthcare to take the annual battle over funding out of the hands of politicians.

### **Concurrent Receipt**

I will work to insure all veterans receive the benefits they have earned. We must end the practice of reducing a veterans pension because he is also receiving disability pay. No other federal employee faces this tax and this discrimination against veterans is unfair.

### **Montrose and Castle Point VA Hospitals**

The veterans of the Lower Hudson Valley deserve great medical care. I will monitor the CARES process closely to ensure that its decisions serve veterans and not VA bureaucrats.